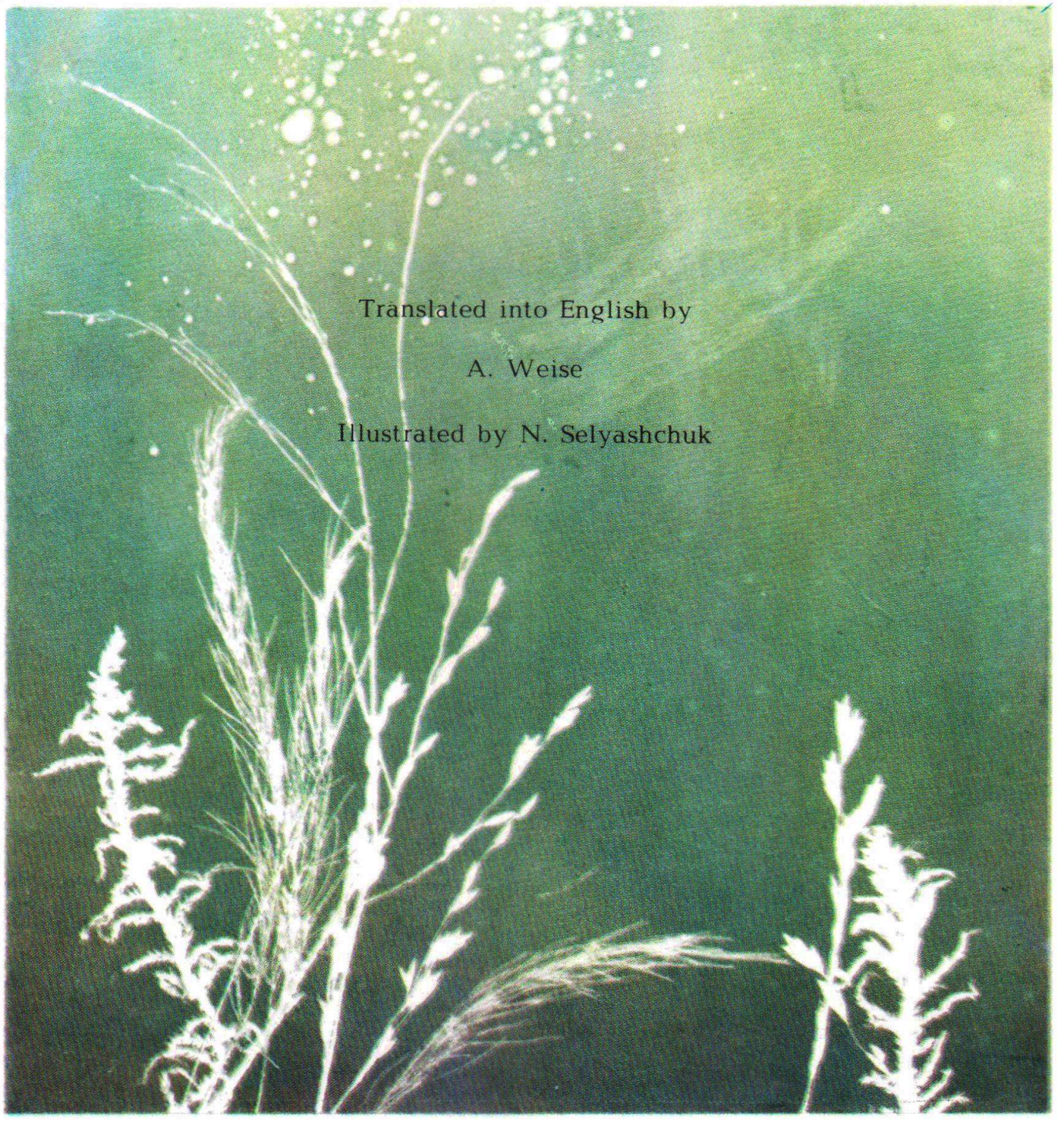
A LATVIAN FOLK-TALE
The World of Tales
How the cooper outwitted the wolf, the bear and the hare



Translated into English by

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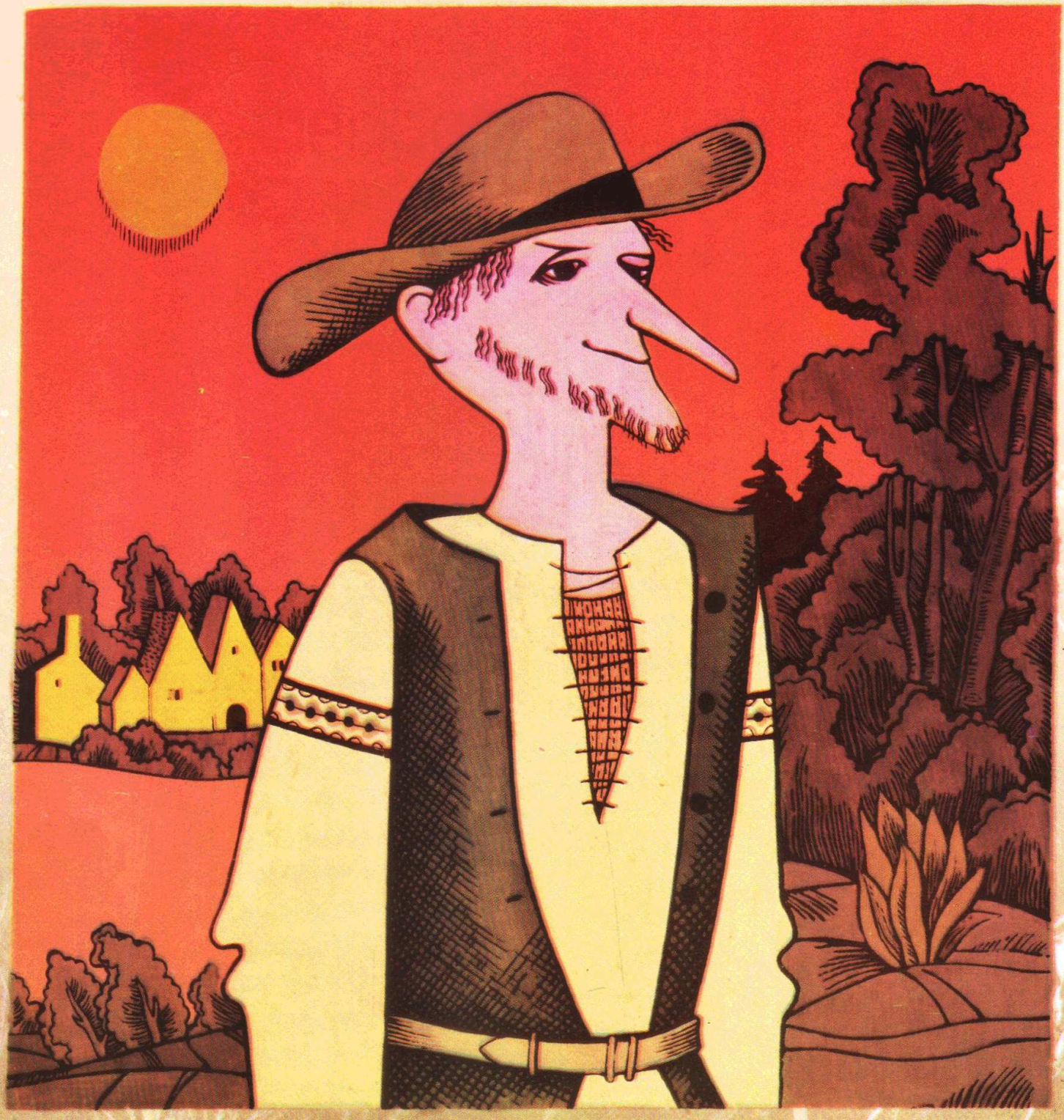

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The cooper was making a large barrel in the forest. He had just finished fastening all the rivets and putting on all the hoops. Now there was only some planing to be done here and there. Suddenly he heard a noise behind him — twigs were breaking under somebody's tread. The cooper turned round and stood rooted to the ground. A bear was walking straight in his direction.

What could the man possibly do? Climb up a tree? The bear would go after. Run away? The bear would give chase and catch him. The cooper was at his wit's end. And the bear was already breaking his way through the bushes near-by.

Now the cooper lifted up the barrel slightly and slipped under it.

The bear came up and saw the barrel. What was that? Neither a stone nor a hillock. He thought that he might just as well have a rest upon whatever it was. In an instant he was already seated on the barrel driving away the mosquitoes with his paw.

It so happened that a wolf was passing by about his business.

The bear hailed the wolf:

"Hey there, Grey One... where are you off to? Just sit together with me for a while and tell me something, will you?"

So the bear and the wolf sat side by side and talked about one thing after another. Suddenly a hare jumped out from behind the bushes and skipped across the glade. The bear also called out to the hare:

"Stop, Squint-Eyed! Aren't you sick and tired of jumping about? Do join us and let's talk a little."

The hare did not have to be asked twice. He took a seat next to the bear and the wolf and began to chatter, telling them the forest news.

The wolf listened and listened and suddenly said:

"Eh, I could do with a bit of a meal! My stomach wonders if my throat isn't cut!"

"Me, too," the bear said, "you, Large-Toothed One, what about taking a run and getting us something to eat. And in the meantime I'll also do my level best to pick up a thing or two."

"Settled," the wolf agreed, "only three days ago in the village I noticed a fat ram in the cooper's household. I'll go there and try to talk the ram into leaving the cattle-shed. And you, Mr. Bear, what will you bring?"

"It wouldn't be half bad to have some honey

tor dessert," the bear replied. "There's a barrel of very sweet honey in the apiary of that very man, the cooper."

"And the cooper's wife has grown a rare crop of cabbages," the hare joined in. "Every head is as big as that pate of yours, Mr. Bear. I'll run over to her kitchen-garden."

As the cooper was sitting under the barrel he could hear the whole conversation.

"Well, well," he thought, "if it goes on like that, they will ravage the whole of my household! But I'm not as simple as that! I'll teach you all such a lesson that you shall remember the cooper for the rest of your lives!"

The fellows arranged to meet at the same place again and ran off in different directions: the wolf to the cattle-shed, tne hare to the kitchen-garden and the bear to the apiary.

Here the cooper climbed out from under the barrel and also bolted straight for his own house. He took a short cut so as to get there ahead of the wolf. And he made it. He chased the ram into the house — to keep him out of harm's way — hid himself behind a corner of the shed and told his wife to put a kettle of water to boil.

Before long the wolf, too, made his appearance

in the cooper's yard. He slipped through the gate and made straight for the cattle-shed. The man let the wolf enter, made fast the door of the shed and called out to his wife:

"Hey, my lady, bring the boiling water!"

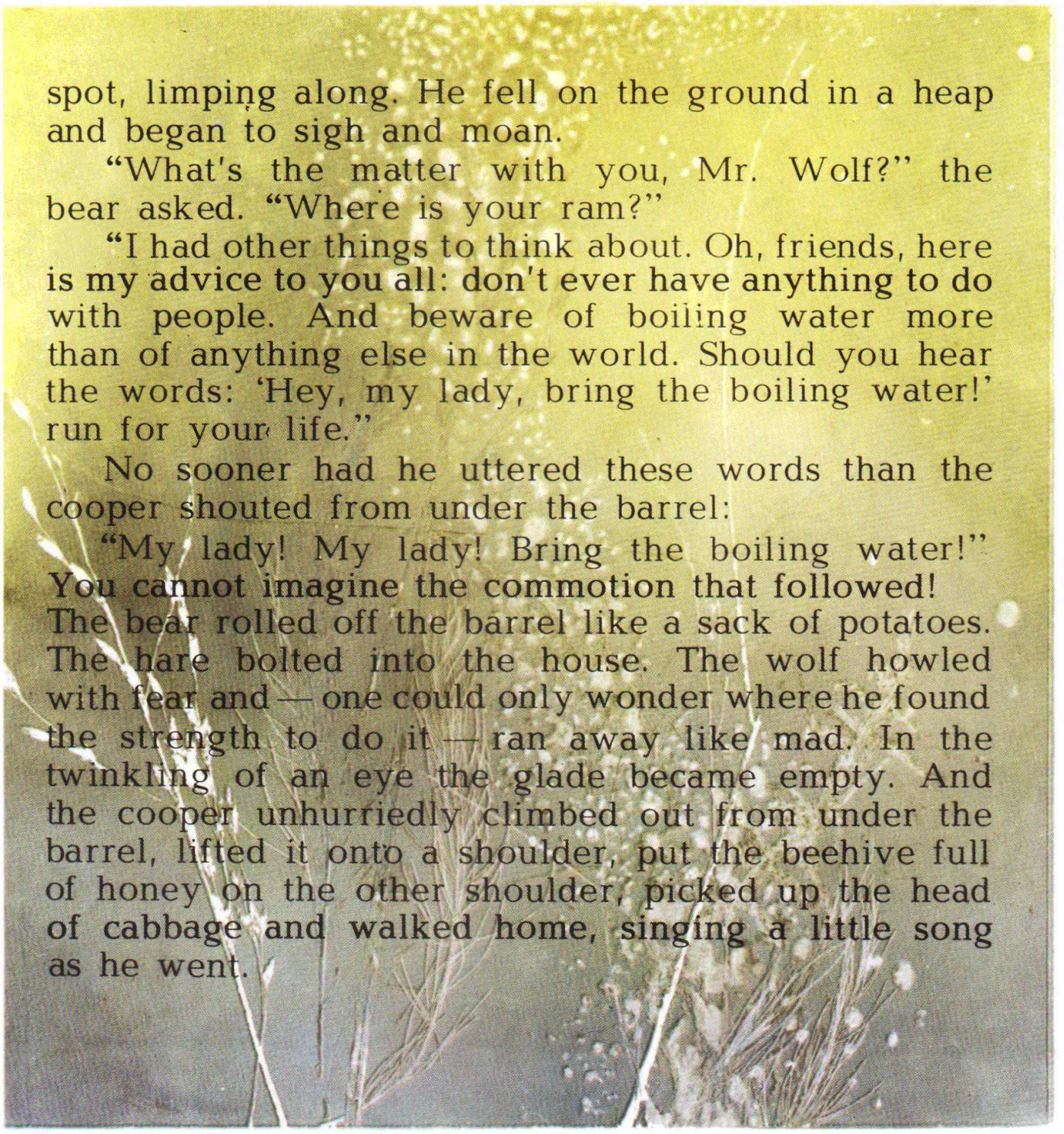
His wife had the kettle ready. The man opened the door and as soon as the wolf, empty-handed, ran out from the shed, the woman poured the boiling water over him. The scalded wolf howled with pain and rushed out of the gate.

The cooper left too. He jumped over the fence and made for the familiar spot in the forest.

He ran up to his own barrel and got under it again. He sat there waiting. In no time the bear returned carrying a big hive. Then the hare came skipping over with a head of cabbage. The wolf, however, was late. No wonder, for after the shower he had got he was well out of the running.

By and by the wolf appeared from behind the trees. He could hardly walk, his legs hardly moved. But the hare and the bear were thinking, it seemed, that their grey friend had killed such a very big ram that he could hardly plod along with a heavy load on his back.

Finally the scalded wolf somehow reached the



spot, limping along. He fell on the ground in a heap and began to sigh and moan.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Wolf?" the bear asked. "Where is your ram?"

"I had other things to think about. Oh, friends, here is my advice to you all: don't ever have anything to do with people. And beware of boiling water more than of anything else in the world. Should you hear the words: 'Hey, my lady, bring the boiling water!' run for your life."

No sooner had he uttered these words than the cooper shouted from under the barrel:

"My lady! My lady! Bring the boiling water!"

You cannot imagine the commotion that followed! The bear rolled off the barrel like a sack of potatoes. The hare bolted into the house. The wolf howled with fear and — one could only wonder where he found the strength to do it — ran away like mad. In the twinkling of an eye the glade became empty. And the cooper unhurriedly climbed out from under the barrel, lifted it onto a shoulder, put the beehive full of honey on the other shoulder, picked up the head of cabbage and walked home, singing a little song as he went.

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Латышская народная сказка
На английском языке

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